

Lambda Letters Project

32597

Vol. 6, No. 3

March, 1998

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Annual Meeting Approaches

Sacramento Public Library, Archives
and Cultural Exchange
Sacramento, CA

The fourth annual membership meeting of the Lambda Letters Project is scheduled for Saturday, May 9, 1998, in Sacramento at a site still to be announced. The agenda will include a report on the accomplishments of the Project in 1996, approval of the 1998-99 budget (covering April 1, 1998, through March 31, 1999), the election of new board members, and other business that may properly come before the meeting. Please plan to attend our annual meeting. Help us make Lambda Letters a representative democracy!

The meeting begins at 9:30 A.M. with coffee and doughnuts. The business meeting begins at 10:00 A.M.

Attending the annual membership meeting may not exactly sound to you like a fun-filled activity for a Saturday morning—especially if the weather is nice (it better be by May!). If you feel this way, you may have never attended an organization's board meeting before, or you may assume and expect that such meetings are mired by difficult-to-follow parliamentary procedure. Believe us, our meetings are actually fun and can

Continued on page 9

The Important Question Is, "So What?"

Lambda Letters has begun a year-long process of evaluating its effectiveness. The purposes of this evaluation are to determine what we are doing well, what—if anything—isn't working, and how we can improve to serve our communities better. In particular, are we making progress towards the stated purposes of Lambda Letters (on page 2 of this newsletter? The first step toward answering this question is to decide how to measure our effectiveness. Your suggestions will be much appreciated.

A recent article in *reSOURCES*, the newsletter of the Nonprofit Resource Center of the Sacramento Public Library, states that when evaluating an organization, it is important to ask the following question: *What has changed in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, or the community as a result of the program?* For example, we can, and do, crow about the number of letters and messages we deliver each year. In 1997 we delivered over 47,000 letters and messages to your elected officials. But then we need to ask the question: *So what?* Did all those letters make a difference for

Continued on page 8

Also in This Issue:

Defining Gender to Combat Hate Crimes	3
Regulating Handguns to Prevent Gang Killings .	3
Lifting Moratorium on Needle-Exchange	4
Helping Non-English Speaking Victims	4
Military Ignoring Rule of Law	5
Senator Knight Attacking Again	6
ROTC Bill Still Alive	7

Lambda Letters Progress Report

Letters Collected

January, 1998	5,062 letters
In all of 1998	5,062 letters

Dollars Spent

January, 1998	\$1,503
In all of 1998	\$1,503

Can You Help?

Please support the very important work of the Lambda Letters Project with your contributions.

Lambda Letters Project

Statement of Purpose

To promote people of color, feminist, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and HIV/AIDS status advocacy, and to bring people of color, women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered persons, and persons affected by or living with HIV/AIDS into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof.

Board of Directors

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Publication of the name of any person or organization in articles or advertising in the Lambda Letters Project newsletter is not to be construed as any indication of the sexual orientation of such person or organization.

Confidentiality

The Lambda Letters Project does not sell or loan its mailing list to anyone. We give no information about who is, or is not, a member of the Project. We do, occasionally, send mailings on behalf of other worthwhile organizations, but this is done by our own volunteers so that no other organization has the opportunity to copy our mailing lists.

The Lambda Letters Newsletter is published monthly except in December by the
Lambda Letters Project Inc.,
6212 Silverton Way, Carmichael, CA 95608.

Postmaster: send address changes to the address above.

Advertising Rates

Business-card sized ads (3½" x 2") \$10 per issue,
quarter-page ads \$20 per issue, half-page ads \$30 per issue,
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*These cities share an office.

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Defining Gender to Combat Hate Crimes

by Hilary Cook

While there is currently a push to improve federal hate-crime legislation, the vast majority of such crimes are prosecuted at the state level. Therefore, it's a serious concern when California district attorneys are failing to fully enforce existing law. Sheila Kuehl (D-Encino) introduced A.B. 1999 in order to remedy this problem.

Current laws cover hate crimes based on actual or perceived gender and actual or perceived sexual orientation. However, most district attorneys have declined to pursue cases where the victim was targeted because he or she was transgendered. Whether it is from a lack of understanding of the law, or because of a lack of will, district attorneys outside San Francisco and Los Angeles have not prosecuted such cases as bias crimes. A.B. 1999 provides a definition of gender that makes the scope of the law crystal clear.

"'Gender'," the text states, "means a person's actual or perceived sex, and includes a person's identity, appearance, or behavior, whether or not that identity, appearance, or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person's sex at birth."

It is important to everyone in the l/g/b/t community that both sexual orientation and gender identity be included because there is often overlap between these categories. In California, the prosecution of a hate crime is based on the motive of the attacker, not on the actual status of the victim. Thus, if a perpetrator attacks someone thinking he is a gay man, that is a hate crime, regardless of whether the victim is actually gay. In many attacks against gays, lesbians, or bisexuals, the attacker may have chosen the victim more for his or her violation of gender norms than for his or her presumed same-sex attraction. Similarly, it is common for female-to-male transsexuals to be targeted by perpetrators who mistake them for gay men.

Perpetrators of hate crimes need to get the message that there are no easy targets. Please sign your letter to a member of the Assembly Public Safety Committee, urging him or her to pass A.B. 1999.

Help End the Carnage

by Boyce Hinman

A recent article in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* reports that there were 39,720 gun-related deaths in this country in 1994. The same article reports that more teens currently die from gunshot wounds than from all other natural causes combined. The article's authors predict that by 2003, bullets will kill more people of all ages than automobile accidents.

A report from the California Department of Justice indicates that in 1996 (the latest year for which statistics are available) there were 1,866 homicides resulting from the use of handguns. Of that number, 564 of the victims were African American, 924 were Hispanic, and only 253 were white. Obviously, people of color are suffering most from this carnage.

A study done by Dr. Garen Wintemute at the University of California, Davis, found that young adults without criminal records who buy cheap "junk handguns" are nearly twice as likely to commit violent crimes as those who buy more expensive handguns.

Senator Richard Polanco (D-Los Angeles) has introduced S.B. 1500 in an attempt to reduce the carnage, and this bill deserves our support. S.B. 1500 establishes regulations for handguns. It requires that:

- ♦ Anyone who manufactures, imports, or sells concealed handguns must certify that those guns are not prohibited unsafe handguns. In particular, to be considered safe, concealed handguns must have a safety device that meets certain standards.
- ♦ These handguns must be tested for safety by an independent laboratory certified by the State Department of Justice.
- ♦ The State Department of Justice must compile and publish a list of the makes and models of concealed weapons found to meet certain safety standards.
- ♦ It will be illegal to manufacture, import, sell, give, lend, or possess an unsafe concealed weapon.

The intent of the above language is to greatly reduce the supply of cheap handguns ("Saturday Night Specials") used by gangs in violent crimes. S.B. 1500 is a very reasonable response to a serious problem. Please write to the Assembly members shown in your sample letter and express your support of the bill.

Moratorium on Needle-Exchange Programs Ending

by Eva Lujan

On April 1, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala has the power to lift the moratorium established by Congress on the federal funding of needle-exchange programs, which are aimed at limiting the spread of HIV and AIDS. Unsafe injection practices among drug users remains one of the primary ways that HIV is transmitted in California and the nation. About 32 percent of all AIDS cases in the U.S. have been associated with injection drug use.

Current California law prohibits individuals from possessing injection needles or syringes without a prescription. The approval of federal funding for clean needle- and syringe-exchange programs would provide a tremendous boost to efforts to repeal these restrictions in California.

Many organizations are urging the Clinton Administration to eliminate federal restrictions on, and to fund, needle-exchange programs. Among these are the American Bar Association, the American Medical Association, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and an expanding list of medical, scientific, and community-based organizations. Without needle-exchange programs, thousands of people are placed at risk.

Please sign the letter addressed to President Clinton, urging him to instruct Shalala to lift the bans on federal funding of needle-exchange programs.

Non-English Speaking Victims Need Sensitive Interpretive Services

by Carla Leek

Although the battles over language in California are far from over, one thing is certain: domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse are not restricted to people who speak English and who are familiar with California's legal system. No one knows for sure how often non-English women are victims of crimes, especially crimes that are traditionally underreported. Faced with what's often called "the second assault" by our legal system—namely, not providing legal support to those who have difficulties speaking or understanding English—it is not surprising that many victims choose silence.

A.B. 1532, authored by Kevin Shelley (D-San Francisco), acknowledges the obstacles faced by non-English speaking crime victims and notes that translation services should be executed in a manner that reduces the trauma of reporting and prosecuting domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse. The bill would create an investigative interpreter program for a trial period of two years. During the trial period, the program would provide translation services while gathering data for California's Office of Criminal Justice Planning, enabling it to recommend long-term solutions for non-English speaking crime victims.

Although advances have been made in recent years to reduce the effects of "the second assault," the task is far from complete. A.B. 1532 seeks to remedy this situation.

Deborah A. Brooks

Certified Public Accountant



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Our Military Still Ignores Rule of Law

The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) has issued its fourth annual report on the implementation of the U.S. Military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy. The report documents a continuing flagrant violation of the policy established by Congress and signed into law by President Clinton.

Two of the absolute pillars of a stable, healthy democracy are the unquestioned supremacy of the nation's civilian officials over the military and the absolute submission of the military to the rule of law. In this light, the continued contempt by military leaders of the laws regarding gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military can only be viewed as dangerous for our society. If we allow the military to violate these laws with impunity, we risk their violation of other laws as well.

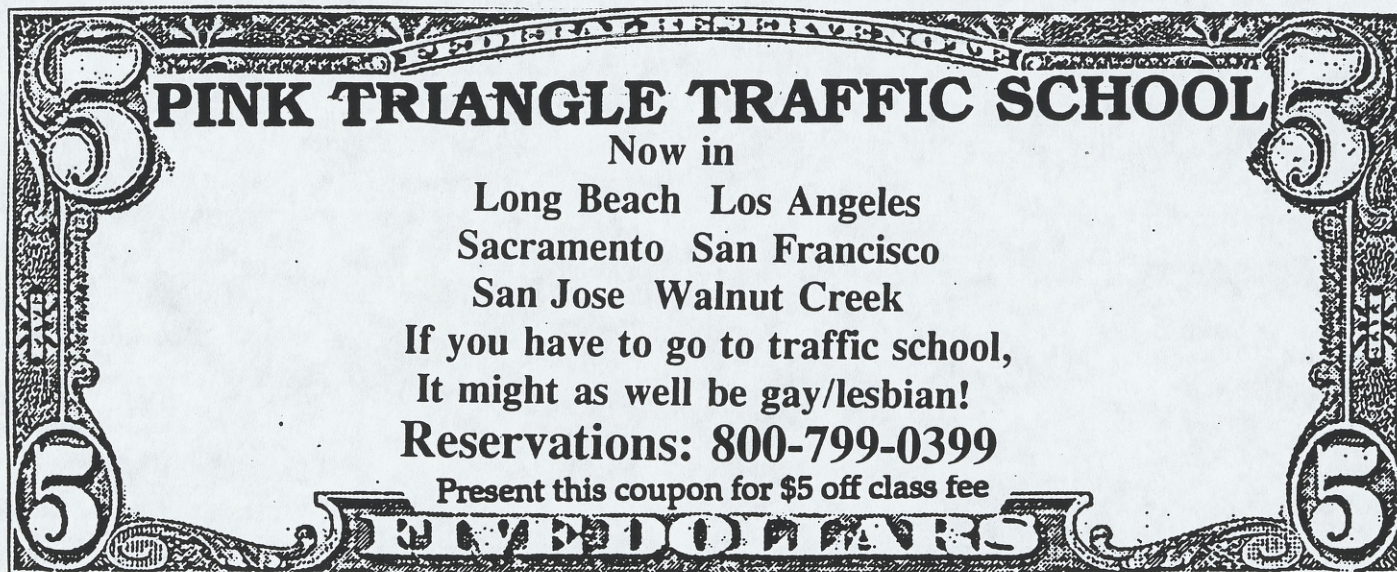
Here is what the SLDN reported. For the fourth consecutive year, the SLDN has documented continued asking, harassment, and witch hunts against military personnel suspected of being gay—in violation of the Defense Department's own regulations. Among this year's top findings:

- ♦ The service branches have failed to train commanders and investigators in the limits placed on gay investigations.

- ♦ Inquiry officers and investigators use heavy-handed tactics (including threats of criminal charges, confinement, nonjudicial punishment, and "outing" to family members, friends, and colleagues) in pursuit of gay, lesbian, and bisexual servicemembers.
- ♦ "Don't Ask" violations are up by 39 percent over last year, indicating a sharp increase in violations of the most simple of the policy's limits: don't ask.
- ♦ "Don't Pursue" violations are up 23 percent.
- ♦ "Don't Harass" violations are up 38 percent.
- ♦ Total Department of Defense violations have climbed 29 percent.
- ♦ The Navy was the worst offender in violating the "Don't Ask" policy last year.

Clearly this issue requires a lot of work on the part of the community.

The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network is "the sole national legal aid and watchdog organization that assists servicemembers hurt by the Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue policy." You can learn more about them on the World Wide Web at www.sldn.org. Besides their alerts, a "survival guide," and links to servicemembers home pages, they carry the full text of the military policy—which is a fascinating read in itself.



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LLP Goes International with E-mail Alerts

Several times each month, Lambda Letters issues an e-mailed legislative alert to a growing list of e-mail activists. The alerts give details on fast-breaking legislative issues of concern to the community. They include legislators' e-mail addresses and sample messages on the subjects covered by the alerts. People are asked to send messages to their legislators on those issues and to notify Lambda Letters that they have done so.

We regularly get responses from a woman living in Switzerland who describes herself as a past and future resident of California. Responses also come from a man in Boston who is an officer of a LGBT military veterans group in the Northeast. Most of our respondents, however, are residents of California.

In January alone, over 2,800 messages were sent to our state legislators as a result of these alerts. Some of those messages may have been responsible for saving a good bill from almost certain defeat. Assemblywoman Sheila Kuehl (D-Encino) attended an event at the State Capitol given by Lambda Letters on January 26th. At the event, she announced that her Sex Equity in Education Act (A.B. 499) was dead because she just did not have the votes needed to pass it in the Assembly. Lambda Letters had already gathered 584 letters in support of the bill through our sample letters mailed out with our newsletter. However, we also gathered almost 1,500 messages of support for the bill via our e-mail alert system. The bill did finally pass in the Assembly in January. We are now engaging in an e-mail campaign to get the bill approved by its first Senate committee.

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Senator Knight Attacks Again

Life Lobby has provided the following information on the latest bigoted legislation introduced by Senator Peter Knight (R-Palmdale).

An indefatigable foe of all things gay, Senator Knight has introduced another anti-gay measure. S.B. 1484 would prohibit the University of California and the California State University systems from offering any domestic partner benefits to their lesbian and gay employees. Senator Knight objects to the possibility that state tax dollars could be used to "subsidize relationships that have not been legally recognized by the elected representatives of the taxpayers of California."

"S.B. 1484 is only the latest in a string of attacks on the gay and lesbian community by Mr. Knight," said Laurie McBride, Executive Director of LIFE Lobby. "He seems obsessed with trying to prohibit our relationships in any form, from domestic partners to marriage. He uses every opportunity to debase our very lives, to deny us any form of societal support. He condemns our every attempt to live in responsible, committed relationships."

Over the past two years, Senator Knight has led efforts to ban recognition of same-sex marriages in California. While such marriages cannot legally be performed here under existing law, California currently recognizes all marriages legally performed in any other state. Therefore, if Hawaii's Supreme Court decides in favor of allowing same-sex marriages, such marriages would be considered legal here.

Lambda Letters issued an alert on S.B. 1484 in February. As of this writing, that alert resulted in over 1,100 messages of opposition to this bill.

Silence is the virtue of fools.

— Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

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Bad ROTC Bill Still Lives

Last year Assemblyman Steve Baldwin (R-La Mesa) introduced A.B. 424 with the underlying purpose of allowing ROTC programs at California's public colleges and universities to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Unfortunately, the bill has passed both houses of the state legislature.

A.B. 424 is presently in the State Assembly (as of late February) which must approve changes made when the bill was in the Senate. If the Senate changes are accepted by the Assembly, the bill will be sent to the Governor who, undoubtedly, will sign it. The bill is now in the inactive file in the Assembly, but it could be reactivated by Assemblymember Baldwin at any time.

The bill has gone through many revisions as it went through the legislature. In its present form it says that ROTC programs and military recruiters may not be ejected from state-funded colleges or universities for discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation.

The bill does also prohibit such discrimination by ROTC programs. However, this policy contradicts the Department of Defense policy on the commissioning of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals in the military. Thus, even if some of our community attend ROTC classes, the military will refuse to commission them. By prohibiting the removal of discriminatory ROTC programs from campuses, A.B. 424 eliminates the one tool these campuses have to combat the discrimination.

Lambda Letters issued an e-mail alert on the bill in late February and expects to gather 1,500-2,000 messages in opposition to it.

City of Houston Executive Order Protects Transgendered Employees

by Phyllis Frye, Transgender Law and Policy, Inc.

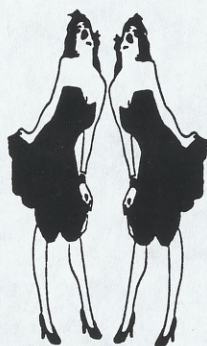
On Monday, February 16th, 1998, Mayor Lee P Brown of Houston signed an executive order prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. The magic is in the definition of sexual orientation, which reads "the actual or perceived status of a person with respect to his or her sexuality." The term sexuality can be defined in many ways, and the real or perceived status of a person's "sexuality" definitely covers the transgender experience.

Hats off to the mayor and his legal staff.

Hats off to Annise Parker, Houston's first openly-queer elected member of Houston's city council. She has striven for transgender inclusion from the beginning.

Hats off to Houston TG leaders, including but not limited to Vanessa Edwards, Marie Gallagher, Michelle Myers, Sarah DePalma and many others who were out and visible and worked on Annise's campaign and followed this executive order through to the signing. Good work!

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So What?

Continued from page 1

any of the people, organizations, or communities that we seek to serve?

We could answer that question by determining whether any significant new civil rights laws were passed, or if any particularly bad bills were defeated. We could also compare our legislators' voting records from year to year to see whether our scores of them improved.

There are two problems with these approaches. First, our efforts are still too small for us to claim to be the main reason for any improvement in the above factors. We must be realistic about what we have control over. Second, even if we could make such a claim, that would not necessarily change your life for the better.

So what can we control? We can provide you with information about legislation that affects your life. We can provide you with ways to let you tell your legislators what you think about that legislation, and we can keep you informed of the progress of that legislation.

As you will see in our statement of purpose on page 2 of this newsletter, Lambda Letters' purpose is to promote advocacy for the people of the communities we serve and to bring the people of those communities into full participation in the mainstream of American society, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof.

We need to define the "so what?" questions that will help us determine whether Lambda Letters is truly moving in the direction of fulfillment of that purpose and what changes, if any, are needed to improve our progress toward that end. We also need to ask these questions about each of our activities to determine which ones are—or are not—contributing toward our purpose. Your suggestions on exactly what questions to ask and how to find the answers to them will be much appreciated.

Boyce Hinman, Administrator

Media Spotters Needed

Lambda Letters Project is embarking on a new media campaign to make the Project more visible in California. We plan to issue frequent press releases on issues of concern to the Project and the people we serve.

One way to determine the effectiveness of the campaign is to monitor the number of times Lambda Letters is mentioned in the l/g/b/t or mainstream media. We need you to be our ears and eyes. If you hear Lambda Letters mentioned on radio or TV, please let us know. If you see an article about the Project, please send us a copy of the article. You can simply enclose it with your signed letters when you send them to us.



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Annual Meeting Update

Continued from page 1

be quite educational! The board conducts its business in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. Before long, you'll appreciate the work that goes into running an organization such as the Lambda Letters Project.

If you can make it, great! If you are unable to attend, please *complete and return the proxy statement* enclosed with this newsletter. This is very important because, unless we have a quorum of one third of the members present—in person or by proxy—we cannot accomplish the important business of the meeting

Join the Board!

Do you wish to run for a seat on the board of directors of Lambda Letters? If so, send your name, phone number, and a brief biographical statement explaining why you want to join the board. We will publish your candidacy in the next Lambda Letters newsletter. Please submit your information by March 27th.

You (Probably) Qualify to Vote!

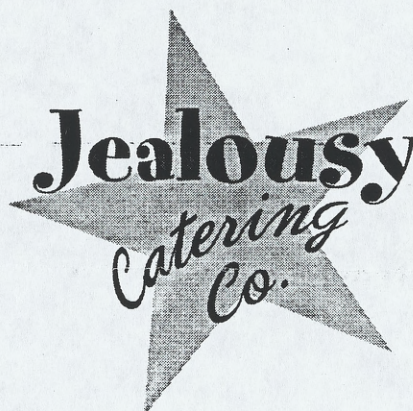
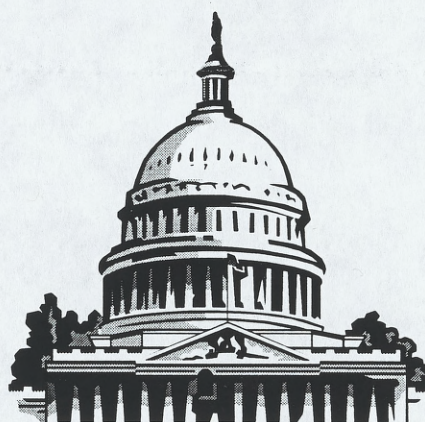
Anyone who is a member in good standing at the time of the annual meeting may vote at the meeting.

According to guidelines adopted by the board of directors, a member in good standing is anyone who has returned one or more signed letters to Lambda Letters during February, March, or April 1998, who provided a minimum of three hours of volunteer service to the Project during those same months, or who made financial contributions to the Project during the twelve months prior to the meeting. Under these rules, almost anyone receiving this newsletter qualifies to vote at our annual meeting.

We hope you will attend and help make Lambda Letters a member-run organization. Please note that even if you send us your proxy, you will be able to vote at the meeting should you decide to attend the meeting after all.

Become an Advocate!

Become our people of color advocate and help us choose one subject a month (usually a piece of legislation) that is of concern to the people of color community. You'll spend only about 10–12 hours a month researching possible subjects and composing letters and articles. Do you have Internet access? Lambda Letters can provide leads on sources of information and advice on composing letters and articles. This exciting position enables you to have a direct impact on legislation that affects our daily lives.



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